CATHOLIC ART QUARTERLY

THE CATHOLIC ART ASSOCIATION

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EASTER 1944
VOLUME VII
NUMBER 2

The Catholic Art Quarterly

Official Bulletin of the Catholic Art Association.
Published four times a year, Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, Michaelmas,
at St. John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota.

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Since the *Catholic Art Quarterly* appears only four times a year and space is consequently valuable, the policy has been adopted of not publishing material that is easily accessible in secular sources unless it is presented from a new or important angle, or is given a Catholic interpretation, and is in accord with Catholic Art Association principles.

C.A.A. MEMBERSHIPS AND PRIVILEGES

SUSTAINING MEMBERS contribute $25.00 annually toward the maintenance of the Association's work, receive the *Catholic Art Quarterly*, vote in all elections, and have access to the library and the exhibits.

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The Catholic Art Quarterly

VOL. VII EASTER 1944 No. 2

Official Bulletin of the Catholic Art Association
Published at St. John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota,
with ecclesiastical approval.

PRESIDENT'S PAGE

IN the early beginnings of the C.A.A. I recall how debate waxed warm as to whether or not the content and subject matter of our art works had to be religious to be considered "Catholic" art. The arguments finally crystalized into the idea that content did not necessarily have to be sacred or religious, provided only that right thinking pervaded our efforts; namely that the basic four causes of philosophy espoused by the C.A.A. were observed in our works. This is nothing else than a restatement of the truth that if we are concerned about truth and goodness, beauty will take care of itself—and that our works will be integrally sound or 'Catholic'. While there are still some among our ranks who persist in the philistine doctrines of "art for art's sake," or art for a thrill's sake, a great many have ultimately accepted the rational scholastic approach and are more concerned with the didactic than the entertainment phase of the arts.

And yet, as apostles of the Christian reconstruction, we of the C.A.A. are missing a magnificent opportunity if at the present time we continue to water down our art efforts to the point where content is largely concerned with purely naturalistic themes, and where strong emphasis is not consistently placed upon sacred themes, religious and Christian content. There can be no informed Catholic so naive as to think the present world crisis is just another struggle to shift the balance of political power between nations, or to gain hitherto withheld economic advantages; that it is a conflict between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', or between the allies and the axis, or between democratic and totalitarian systems of government. In its deepest roots, the struggle is an overripe phase brought about by the accumulated and allied falsehoods of centuries—naturalism, rationalism and materialism; exaggerated individualism and its modern countermovements, communism and totalitarianism. In an age when the cult of material "progress" and the fetish of scientism has usurped the place of metaphysics, and when economics has crowded out the place of theology in men's lives, the struggle at bottom is not between nations, races or governments, but between the secular and the supernatural mentalities.

At a time therefore when the forces of secularism are slugging it out among themselves and as a consequence utter confusion results in the minds of the masses, we have the supreme psychological opportunity to present once more the eternal verities of Christ and His truth, His way of life, to bewildered

and weary humanity. Our task therefore as Christian artists is to aid in again supernaturalizing a thoroughly secularized society, and to make it as theocentric as it was in the ages of faith. And how shall we accomplish this, if we do not constantly, in season and out of season, present Christ to it? This means that the content and subject matter of our works will more and more have to take on a sacred, hieratic, and liturgical character.

Where shall we find the inspiration for such Christian and sacred themes? Pius X used two *significant* words, whose full import as yet seem unrealized by Catholic masses: he calls the liturgy of Holy Mother Church the *primary and the indispensable source of the Christian spirit*. Daily living of the Church's liturgy will therefore acquaint us with the gospels, the lives of the saints, the sacraments, the sacramentals, all rich and abundant sources of art themes.

If we are fully imbued with the spirit of Christ, then it will be impossible for us to hold our peace, but we will be constrained to show Him to others. "Where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also."

Angelo Zankl, O.S.B.

ANNUAL BUSINESS REPORT

TO THE CATHOLIC ART ASSOCIATION

November '42 - '43

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS:

Quoted from accounting submitted by Frank Seaman, Treasurer.

Funds received	$1041.17
Funds disbursed	582.53
Bank Balance, Oct. 30, 1943	458.64

Quoted from accounting submitted by Sister Helene, O.P., Secretary

Funds received from Treasurer	$ 51.00
Quarterly postage	15.29
Postage for general correspondence and membership forms	35.61

COMMITTEE REPORT:

The Professional Exhibit has been shown at

Nazareth College, Nazareth, Kentucky
St. Paul's College, Brookland, Washington, D.C.
Convent of the Sacred Heart, New York City
Sheil School of Social Studies, Chicago
Liturgical Week, Chicago

and is scheduled to be shown in the near future at

Mundelein College, Chicago
Alvernia High School, Chicago

At present the exhibit mountings are being renovated with the gracious assistance of Miss Ann Grill. To bring the collection up to date new items are being sought from selected exhibitors.

Quoted from Report submitted by Melville Steinfels, Chairman,
Professional Committee

Modern Religious Art

THE past few centuries have given us a period of what was largely decadent art. We hope that period is past, even if some of the lingering odor of decay still offends us. After this came a primitive experimental period. The modern work from Cezanne to Picasso has been a re-investigation of the fundamentals of design and technique. Following these men, many great artists have done an enormous amount of experimental work which seems to have little interest to the man in the street, but is nevertheless invaluable to other artists in the same way as the discoveries of research workers in laboratories are invaluable to men of science, and ultimately to the world. These experiments have given artists a new start and taught them much—for they have mastered their alphabet anew. Now they should be ready to say something. And when it comes to that, it is the Catholic artist who should have the most important message to deliver.

Catholic artists should now be ready to produce vital religious art, and their opportunity may come at the end of the war. In the first few years of the post-war period stimulation of peace-time activities may cause as many new churches to be built and old ones renovated as there normally might be in a quarter century. The building and remodeling of many churches will create an increased demand for the work of artists—or for a substitute for the work of artists!

It is important that this demand be met with real art of the best character, because art traditionally has been used by the Church to teach. It has an apostolic function. Bad art, to quote Maritain, "is an offense to God and much more harmful than is believed to the spread of religion."

Outside the Catholic Church a great proportion of our population is rapidly becoming religionless. Many admit it if asked their faith; many more will name this or that sect with little meaning other than to explain their ancestral traditions. But since religion is natural to man and a way of life is essential, these masses must someday seek a religion or a reasonable fac-simile. What is there to lead them to the true Faith? The Catholic Church is the one organization they are most disinclined to enter, for the last thing a former Protestant clings to in his old religion is its traditional opposition to Catholicism. Few will put themselves directly under the influence of a priest. They may seek information from Catholic laymen, or find it (perhaps accidentally) in Catholic literature. If their interest leads them on, finally and inevitably they must inspect those externals of the Church which are visible to them—its buildings and its form of worship. And what will be the mental impression of what they see?

Will the Catholic churches they visit renew the ancient prejudices they had all but forgotten? Will those who had once been taught that Catholicism is an outworn superstition and a remnant of unenlightened ages find religious art and images which could be tolerated only by the ignorant and venerated only but the superstitious? Will those who were told that the Church had lost its

vitality centuries ago and that it is now conservative to the point of being reactionary, find its buildings decorated with dead art, bad copies of poor imitations of work that centuries ago had birth in a living Faith? Will those who fear that the Church is opposed to all intellectual liberty of the individual find a cast-in-the-same-mold type of art to confirm this fear? Will they all see nothing that is good and then go off saying, "By their fruits you shall know them"? We know the real fruits of the Church are spiritual, and in them goodness is not wanting. But, in a sense, the works of art which spring from her material needs can also be called her fruits, and why should we give the devil a chance to quote scripture to his purpose?

BEHIND the creation of all the tawdry religious art is the working proverb of most business—"Give the public what it wants!" Sometimes it is the pastor who feels that he must give his people what they want. More often it is the business man, whose special function in our society is giving, who gives people what they want—what they want enough to pay for.

This proverb would be a good one if it meant that we should give the public what it really wants—that is, what it lacks—what it needs.

Most Americans want white bread just because they are used to it. They need the food values of whole grain bread, but very few prefer to eat it. This can be corrected by education, especially in the young. Those who have eaten whole grain bread from childhood do not object to it. Aesthetically, Catholic children are weaned on trash. Look at the "pretty" pictures that illustrate most of the booklets used to teach them the Mysteries of their Faith. Look—if you can without pain—on the holy cards given them by their teachers. With their tastes so educated in their youth, what can be expected of them later? The insidious thing is that those who so corrupt the aesthetic judgment are usually the persons they revere as teachers of the truth! One thing that must be done is to discourage the use of these cheap pictures which develop the habit of deriving piety only from weak, sentimental images of sissified saints. This may seem like a trivial thing, but if a new generation learns to appreciate more dignified religious art, that art will surely inspire a more worthy piety. And that generation will in time

THE FAMILIAR PATTERN IS NOT ENTIRELY AN IDEAL ONE.

build and adorn churches that will not be stumbling-blocks to those educated outside the fold. These will no longer be scandalized by the Church as she outwardly appears.

But we hope the end of the war and the consequent flood of demands for religious art will not be postponed for a whole generation.

In the case of bread it has been found that the familiar white bread can be enriched with invisible vitamins. The army has not attempted to change the soldier's tastes, but it feeds them the white bread they are used to, synthetically fortified. So also many bakeries do this for civilians. But it is unfortunate that tastes and needs cannot be brought together so simply in matters of art. Since a work of art (of the kind of which I speak) is something to be perceived by the senses, any change in that art which is not perceptible is not a change.

It is a difficult problem for the present-day artist to work without violating his own convictions and yet not violate the ill-trained sensibilities of those who see his work. Outside the field of ecclesiastical work, the artist often may if he pleases do as he pleases. If you don't like what he has done, you needn't look at it. Take it if you can appreciate it; if not, leave it for those who can. This attitude (or *altitude*) is not possible in work for the Church. The Church is not for the few, but for all. An immediate solution must therefore be something in the nature of a getting-together of artist and people. The artist must come closer to the people, the people closer to the artist.

Because art was left an orphan by the Church, the modern artist usually has lacked the great ideals of a unified society to express concretely for that society. So he has been forced, in artistic jargon, "to express *himself*." This ideal of expressing the individual has led to much exaggerated individualism—often a conscious attempt on the part of the artist to be "different." The resulting work is apt to be so peculiar (in both the strict and common sense of the word) that the public is alienated—and the artist becomes even more isolated from society. He is forced further into himself, and the circle becomes vicious. It is not typical of this day, as it once was, that the interest of the public necessitates removal of the scaffolding from an unfinished mural painting. The public does not anxiously await the unveiling of a statue in order to compare it merits with other recent works. Now the people only cry out in disgust when they dislike some work they cannot avoid seeing. They do not bring their interest and understanding to the artist because the artist has withdrawn himself from them. The public, with some reason, has become reactionary—blankly refusing to see any good in modern work.

Thus it might seem that the artist has no choice but to imitate or actually copy the art of past ages if he would have his work accepted by the masses. Such a course leads only to sterility and the multiplication of empty, meaningless forms. It is the stock in trade of most commercial church decorators, and I do not believe it is necessary. For I believe the people would come to accept and welcome vigorous, meaningful original work if the artist would only resist the extremely peculiar—the startling and the shocking. And I believe this extreme can be avoided without any harm to his work if the artist is trying to express something bigger than himself. Regardless of the difficulties under

which others may labor, at least the Catholic artist occupied with the expression of his religion has something bigger of which to tell, something infinitely bigger than himself. He is not limited to expressing his own personality, because he is a member of a Body whose soul is Infinity Itself! (Inevitably the artist would still express himself also—but in truer proportion, for all people are more alike than they are different.)

NOW some may say that the church artist should not attempt to avoid the startling and the shocking—that too many people need to be startled and shocked!—that the explosion of a little dynamite now and then might help a good many Catholics to realize that the Faith they profess is packed full of stuff so strong it would blow them out of their complacency and indifference and right into another world if they gave it half a chance. The argument is a good one and true. But let us see where the dynamite ought to be. A pyrotechnical display of unique artistic style, a superficial display of unusual appearances, is cheap and theatrical, and also unnecessary. The dynamite can be deeper. It should be in the idea expressed, not in the unusual manner in which the colors are applied or the stone is chiseled. It will have, nevertheless, some effect on the exterior appearance, because obviously dynamite cannot be stored in the same kind of container that holds sugar.

THE EXTREMELY PECULIAR—THE STARTLING AND THE SHOCKING.

While it is prudent for the artist to steer away from appearances that are startling and unusual, those who employ the artist and who use his work to assist them in their worship should try to bear with him and understand his purpose if his creation is not too much like what they are accustomed to. The Church asks that its art be not of an unusual character. Yet this must not be interpreted so strictly that it limits ecclesiastical art to a rigid formula. The various styles the Church has successfully used at different times and places prove that she does not wish to keep her art in a straightjacket. Things are too often considered *un*beautiful for no better reason than that they seem unusual. And they may seem unusual merely because of the limitations of an individual's background. Many who are more used to it prefer "Good Night, Sweet Jesus" to the finest Gregorian hymn. Raphael, saturated in the tradition of the Italian Renaissance, in his office of architect to the Pope, condemned to his Holiness the unfamiliar art of northern Europe as barbarous. He did not use the word "barbarous" but a synonym, "gothic," by which we still identify that style. And yet merely because they seem

strange to some we cannot be convinced that all Gregorian music and Gothic art are unsuited to the Church's purpose. Rather let those who consider them strange learn to appreciate their merits. And let those for whom the present-day artists works be not overready to condemn any divergence from the familiar pattern. The familiar pattern is not entirely an ideal one, and, as I have said, dynamite cannot be stored in the same kind of container that can be used to hold sugar.

The artist must be met part way. Some attempt must be made to understand and appreciate his aims. He must be assumed to have some knowledge of his art and therefore to be entitled to some measure of confidence, even as are the electrician, the baker, and the physician. Although the artist can come closer to the people, education is badly needed to bring the people closer to the artist.

Merely putting better art into our churches is one way of educating the people, through familiarity, to want it. But it will take a formal educational campaign to get anything but the most lifeless, run-of-the-mill art into some of our churches. Those who have known nothing better than the mechanical reproductions of "art factories" may consider anything else a shocking innovation. Training everyone to be a discriminating connoisseur may be impossible, but many people, or at least their leaders, could be given a broader knowledge on which to ground their tastes.

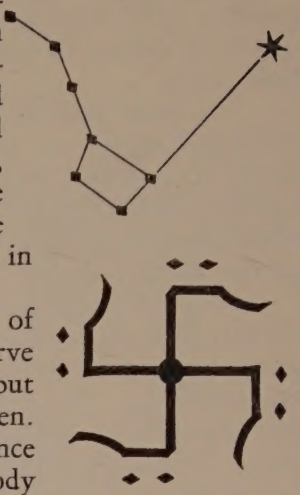
THE person who has learned something of the art of primitive races, of the Egyptians, the Greeks and the Oriental nations, or who knows a little of Byzantine and medieval art will not be too amazed by a Picasso. But the man who boasts, "I know nothing about art; I just know what I like when I see it," will probably have only disgust for a Giotto or an El Greco.

Those who are engaged in education must re-open the doors of our churches to beauty by teaching the recognition of goodness and truth in things made by man. They must do this because only what is good and true and beautiful belongs in the House of God. They must do it in order that those of other households may be tempted to enter therein. And they must do it, for the sake of those who are already in the House. It may be true that "God alone can touch men's hearts with a feeling of piety before the tawdriest chromolithograph, the most heartbreaking daub, as much as before the most sublime masterpiece" (Paul Cazin). But is it wrong to help the Holy Ghost?

When the coming opportunity arrives, there will be artists, living Catholic artists, ready and able to make use of the opportunity, unless perchance they are ignored or rebuffed. Not all of them are Giottos, or Angelicos, or Michelangelos—but perhaps some are. The idea that God made great artists in only one small area of the earth, or in one small space of time—a bygone time—is ridiculous. It is more reasonable to believe that man created conditions permitting artists to accomplish what for other generations remain merely latent potentialities.

MELVILLE STEINFELS

Superstition and Ornament



IN the last issue of the *Catholic Art Quarterly* we discussed the nature of symbolism. We defined symbolism as the embodiment of fundamental religious and metaphysical ideas, for the purpose of giving glory to God and giving service to man. We noticed four general types of symbolic embodiments—rites, myths, chants, and ornaments. As examples of primitive symbols we cited the pole star, the sun, the universal axis, and the house, noticing also the importance of these analogies in Christian thinking.

The subject of the present article is the degeneracy of symbolism. When a symbol has degenerated we observe something that was formerly of great importance, but which has been partly remembered and partly forgotten. The aspect of the symbol which persists is its appearance or body, while the meaning of it, which gave the body life, has perished. We may recognize some degenerate symbols as "superstitions," and others as "ornaments" or "decorations."

SUPERSTITION

THE word "Superstition" comes from the Latin *super* and *statum*, the supine form of *stare*. According to one etymology it means something which "stands over," persists or survives from an earlier into a later time. This primitive meaning apparently had no bad connotations at first, a superstition being merely something handed on by the ancestors to their descendants, a tradition. But it has come to mean a tradition the intellectual content of which has been forgotten. In this sense it is a formula or practice which is still customary, but of which the intention has been lost.

The difficulty of understanding symbols is the exact measure of the ease with which they degenerate. As an illustration, consider a broken hearth stone. A hearth stone is the symbol of the family that inhabits the house of which it is the center. A cracked hearth stone is, therefore, the symbol of a divided family, one whose unity has in some way been shattered. If in some house the hearth stone should crack, and an analogically-minded person should remark that this was a sign of a divided family, how easy it would be for hearers, of a more literal type of mind, to understand him to be *foretelling* division in that family, as if he had meant "the stone is divided, therefore soon the family also will be divided."

But there are much commoner examples than this. We all know people who will not initiate new enterprises on Friday the 13th, for fear that if they do so some misfortune may befall them. Why are they so afraid? It is a superstition, we are told. But why should the combination of this particular day of the week and day of the month have the power to raise these dim dreads?

It seems more than probable that we have here a moribund survival of behaviors which once had intellectual content, but which have it no more. This is apparently a "superstition" in the exact meaning of the word.

The custom of not sitting thirteen at a table is without doubt much older than Christianity. From very early times the feast has been symbolic of Life itself, the feasters representing the natural and supernatural powers in their operations throughout the revolution of the year. The year divides into four seasons, marked by the solstices and the equinoxes, and these seasons are divided each into three, giving us the twelve months of the calendar. The feasters, wishing to conform their ritual to the will of God as displayed in Nature, represented, each one of them, one of the twelve months or one of the Zodiacal signs. Such ceremonial feasts were thus analogies of creation, but the presence of a thirteenth figure would be understood to be that of the Creator Himself, or of the Sun as manifesting the creative power. This could only be proper on special occasions of great ritual significance, and most improper at ordinary human banquets.

The Arthurian legend, which (though it has a Catholic flavor due to its having been handed on to us by Catholic people) is really of pre-Christian origin, gives us a good example of this. In this myth the twelve heroes sat in as many seats about the Round Table, but there was a thirteenth place—the Siege Perilous—which stood empty against the time when the best of all Knights should come to occupy it. The story details the portentious happenings which followed the attempt of Perceval to take up what he ignorantly thought to be a mere human challenge of hardihood. [1]

But the ancient idea of the twelve and the thirteen was taken over by the early Catholics more directly also. They gave to the months and the Sun new meaning. The feasters came to represent not only the cycle of the year, but the apostles and the articles of the creed. The thirteenth was, of course, the Sun of Justice, *O Oriens*, Christ Himself. In the Irish "Vision of MacConglinne" there is a reference to thirteen as "the perfect number, Christ with his apostles." Later at the imperial court of Byzantium, there were, on special occasions, banquets at which the Emperor formally took the place of Christ and sat as the Thirteenth at the table. But such ceremonies were so rare and exalted as to enforce rather than diminish the idea of the impropriety of sitting thirteen at the board. The thought was simply that "thirteen at table" was something that was "not done." It was, if not an actually sacrilegious procedure, at least an indecent one. It must have been thought of much as we would think of using a consecrated chalice at a party. No dreadful accident will befall you if you do such a thing. It is merely the sort of deed that thoughtful and decent people do not do. And in a society where basic thinking is common, and its symbolic expression understood, most people would know *why* it is a thing we do not do.

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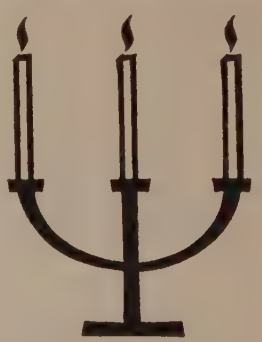
1. See the Didot Perceval (Weston, *Legend of Perceval*, II.20f.)

So also it would seem to be with Friday. It is probable that from very remote times this day has been associated with sorrow, with sacrifice, and with the notion of propitiation. But as with the number 13, Christianity gave Friday a new meaning.

As we celebrate Christ's birth on the twenty-fifth of every December, and His Resurrection on every Sunday, so we commemorate His death on every Friday. The ancient Friday of sorrow and sacrifice becomes a Friday redeemed, the commemoration of the sorrowful day on which the greatest of all conceivable sacrifices was made—God sacrificing Himself. In memory of such an astounding event we stint ourselves in the matter of food, and in the matter of amusements. We do not choose Friday as a day of rejoicing, or for the initiation of new enterprises. The Christian does not suppose that any especial misfortune will befall him if inadvertently he forgets his recollection or his abstinence. He merely regards these as decent and fitting. If he loses the job he took on Friday the 13th he does not assume that this was because that date was "unlucky." He knows that deliberate sins are punished, but he does not fear to be persecuted by Fate for the involuntary infringement of taboos.

BUT what has a combination of forgetfulness and adherence to custom not made of these two ancient decencies! Because at a cosmic banquet it was once considered improper to take the place assigned to the representative of the Creator of the world, and because it was considered indecent to indulge in merrymaking when we should contemplate the suffering and death of its Redeemer, it is now considered by some safer not to buy a farm on Friday the 13th, lest one's cattle should be afflicted with mastitis or the barn burn. What was once "bad form" has degenerated into "bad luck."

So also with rotations, clockwise and counterclockwise. Food is passed at table to the left, not because some modern arbiter of fashion has so decreed, but because in our Northern hemisphere the Sun, the analogue of the Giver of Good Things, so moves. Joyful processions so circulate for the same reason; and, similarly, sorrowful processions should proceed counterclockwise, or widdershins. An example of the latter is the Stations of the Cross which, as a sorrowful procession, proceeds in a direction against the Sun, though in many modern churches we find that this traditional arrangement is neglected.



Salt, which it is "dangerous" to spill at table, is a substance of ancient and widespread symbolic reference. The ladder, under which it is "bad luck" to walk, is one of the forms of the universal axis, or cosmic Pillar. Three lights off a match is a contemporary form of the three candles burning in a room, which is considered so ominous in Russia. Lighted candles are traditionally symbolic of the heavenly bodies.

The bridegroom should carry his bride through the door into their new house, and it is unlucky if he either omit this or stumble on the threshold. To a certain degree the meaning of this is obvious enough, but how little do

we understand of what was once meant! Formerly the analogy between marriage and heaven was widely understood. The new house was assimilated to paradise, where the prince and princess of the fairy tales "lived happily ever afterwards." The bride represents the soul, as in the myth of Cupid and Psyche, and the groom the Psychopomp, or soul-carrier. To pass through the *Janua Coeli* one must fly, and in formal symbolism the nearest to this is to be carried. The gate of heaven is narrow and dangerous—straight is the gate. The Symplegadean rocks are but the Greek form of a world-wide myth of clashing rocks (among the Eskimos they are ice bergs) floating in the ocean, and guarding the passage to the other world. So, just, as the Symplegades clashed together upon the stern of the ship Argo, with its company of heroes, the jambs of the door of the new house may fall inward and crush the passer-through, especially if the trigger of the threshold is trodden on. In India, as the husband carries the new wife into their paradise, he addresses a prayer to the door jambs: "Do not harm her." The husband's foot must not touch the threshold nor must he stumble, or he and his bride will be cheated of their heaven.

If you kill a spider it will rain on the following day. It seems not at all unlikely that this is the remnant of another solar symbol. The spider, sitting on guard at her little door at the center of the diverging lines of her web, is a symbol of the Sun, the door to Eternal Life at the center of its diverging rays, and therefore of God. The symbol was known to the American Indians as well as among the peoples of the Eastern Hemisphere. The spider is connected with the Dome, and with all the rich symbolism of House and Sky. The Sun also is that power who "plays with the waters," lifting them up and letting them fall in rain. The superstition that if you kill a spider it will rain on the following day (the rain being thought of in this connection as a punishment) would seem to be related to these symbols. You offend the Sun by killing his analogue, and he lets fall on you the rain of his displeasure.

ANOTHER common superstition is to the effect that it is "bad luck" to break a mirror. Here again it seems more than probable that the "bad luck" is a confused reminiscence of a "bad form." The mirror is one of the richest of ancient symbols, closely related to the Sun, and representing in particular the mind of God. To see things in a mirror is to see them as they truly are, as God sees them in His Own Mind, in the *Speculum Aeternum*. It is to see them whole and single, in all their aspects at once, unconfused by limitations of Time and Space; in short, it is to see them *sub specie aeternitatis*. "In a broken mirror," says St. Thomas, "many images result, since it has many surfaces, causing many separate reflections." The philosopher is pointing out that the word *speculation* is derived from *speculum*, a mirror, and not from *specula*, a watch tower.

Speculation is not, in the sense we so often give the word today, a business of making guesses, but is a seeing of things in the Eternal Mirror, in relation, that is, to their first principles, as God may be conceived to see them. In the same way *consideration* is a seeing of things in relation to the *sidera*, or eternal stars, thought of as in some way representing first principles. So when we *consider* things, we see them in the stars, and when we *speculate* we see them in the Mirror.

To break a mirror, then, would be a symbolic as well as a practical calamity, not only because it is a symbol of the Divine Mind, but also because one is, as it were, shattering one's own *true* image as it exists *sub specie aeternitatis*. [2]

St. Bonaventure also considers thinking the act of making the mind reflect the reality of God as it is luminously radiated from Him into things, thence to our souls.

Had one the leisure it would be a fascinating study to try to connect as many as possible of our modern taboos with what could be unearthed of their ancient symbolic origins. Such a study would probably indicate that not all our taboos are superstitious symbols. If one had time to go through the evidence, it would probably appear that many come from quite other causes, but at present it is a subject that no one seems to know very much about. It seems likely that a good many, like the ones we have already noticed, are the degenerate remains of once intellectually respectable thoughts and practices. And we can be pretty sure that much of the stupidity associated with superstitions is not to be attributed to our ancestors but to ourselves.

A symbol is the expression of a metaphysical idea. If it is to function for us as a true symbol, we must be in possession of both its body and its soul. The body, whether of rite, chant, myth, or physical thing, must have come down to us, and its soul, or inner meaning, must be ours also. Not all our superstitions are of such high origin, but many are. We know that we should not sit thirteen at table, launch enterprises on Friday the 13th, pass dishes to the right, spill salt or break mirrors, but we have forgotten why we should not do these things.

Human beings are by definition animals capable of reasoning. To be fully human, to be actually rather than only potentially human, we must have reasons for what we do, and reasons that are true ones and intellectually respectable. We have lost some of our humanity when we have forgotten the ancient analogic language of our race, and allowed its symbols to decay into meaningless prohibitions, the anonymous threats of an unreasonable Fate. The vague terror that "something may happen" is sub-human, and is both stupid and cowardly. To understand and face the effects of causes is to exercise intelligence and will. To exercise intelligence and will is to be human.

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2. *Summa Theol.* 1.12.9.10 "Sed omnia sic videntur in Deo sicut in quodam speculo intelligibile . . . non successive, sed simul". *Idem.* 11-11, 180, 3 and 2, and 111,76,3c. "Speculatio dicitur a speculo, non autem a specula, et reducitur ad meditationem . . . in speculo fracto resultant multae imagines, quia habet multas superfices, causantes singulas reverberationes, quia non habent ibi esse quiescens". In 5th *Sum. Theol.* ed. 1932. Index.

DECORATION

WE come now to the other kind of superstition, not so generally recognized as such, but meeting the definition just as exactly. Not only can we continue to *do* things that once had reason, though we have forgotten the reason, but we can continue to *make* things that once had a reason, having forgotten the reason. Such things made, or parts of things made, we usually call "ornaments" or "decorations," and regard their value as "aesthetic." But actually these are ornaments and decorations only in the degenerate senses of these words, and they are the remnants of things whose value was once intellectual and symbolic.

The Latin word *ornare* means to furnish or equip a thing with that which is proper to it, with that which it should have according to its own particular nature. From this word we get *adorn* and *ornament*. *Decus* means fitting and proper, and from this we get *decorate*. In the primary meanings of these words *adorn*, *ornament* and *decorate* there is no hint of the idea of prettification or the addition of "attractive" but meaningless extras.

The ornaments of an altar are its cloths, its candles, its cross, and its sacred vessels, not carved niches, crocketed pinnacles, and empty shields of stone, or bunches of flowers, however lovely. To decorate the altar is properly to furnish and equip it with what is proper to an altar, just as to furnish a dining room is to give it tables and chairs, and as to bridle and saddle a horse is to equip him for a journey.

Proper decoration and ornament is beautiful, and while the beauty is enjoyable and perfects the use of the beautiful thing this enjoyment is not the reason for the decoration. Both the golden ring on the hand of the wife and the bronze ring in the nose of the bull are perfectly made and beautiful, and the enjoyment these beauties give is wholesome and good. The wife is more fully a wife when her wifehood is announced and expressed by this piece of her equipment. The bull is a safer member of the farm family to which he belongs and therefore a better bull, when he is so adorned. In both cases beauty is there, and enjoyment of it, but that enjoyment is not the reason for the wearing of either ring.

The altar should be beautiful, and so should the dining room, the horse, and the rings, but we can only make them so by giving them, as far as possible, what reason tells us they should have, and by rigorously forbidding any element for which there is not sufficient reason.

It is the possession of reason (intelligence and will) that differentiates mankind from the other animals. It is only when man's making is strictly governed by reason that his products are truly human, worthy of the humanity of their producer—works of art.

It is reasonable that a physical being, working in a material world, should make tools with which to work. Man must devise and construct houses, boats, wagons,

looms, coats, hats, and shoes.

It is reasonable that as a spiritual being, concerned with his place in the universe, and his eternal destiny, he should make symbols.

It is reasonable that as an integrated being who naturally desires to maintain integrity in himself and his affairs, he should normally make his tools and his symbols together, devising objects which have at the same time a use and a meaning, or, more strictly, a physical and a metaphysical use. It is normal for him to want to live his life all in one piece, to kill two birds with one stone, to cut his own firewood, so to speak, and thus warm himself twice. It is reasonable for useful things to be symbolic, and for symbolic things to have a physical use also. It is reasonable that the complete and whole man should be served by the complete and whole artifact.

But it is not reasonable to argue that because the beautiful things preserved in our museums from other civilizations are decorated—are furnished with adjuncts and elaborations in which we see only an "aesthetic significance"—that these things had no more intellectual content for their makers and users than for us, and that therefore we can "create beauty" by imposing similarly meaningless adjuncts on the things we make.

THE unreasonableness of trying to superimpose beauty by applying "ornaments" is indicated by the fact that it never works. Beauty cannot be achieved in this way. Beauty sought for as an end in itself, and without reference to goodness and truth, invariably evades the seeker. All that is necessary to achieve beauty is that things should be skillfully made in a manner true to their own natures, and that these natures should be adapted to the human nature whose needs they exist to serve. To him who truly seeks the good of the things he makes, beauty invariably comes unsought. This always succeeds, as the direct pursuit of beauty always fails.

We see this clearly when we consider the ephemeral nature of the "beauty" and "attractiveness" of those things that are designed "to be beautiful." Such beauty and attractiveness go so quickly out of fashion! The moment the fashion has passed, the objects—be they clothes, buildings or pictures—are seen in all their hideousness. The Victorian monstrosities that made Ruskin and Morris sick were in their day regarded as beautiful by the vast majority, but the fashion passed, and then almost everyone saw them for the unholy things they were. Victorian was succeeded by Edwardian, and this in turn by the Modern style, and Modern will in its turn be succeeded by some other fashion. Each generation sees through the sham that preceded it, and the children despise the "art" and the "beauty" of their parents.

It is the same with the conscious forgeries of the world of the "art dealers." The imperfections to which one generation is blind are glaring to the generation that follows. An artistic "fake" that fools even the experts when that kind of thing is in favor, fools no one a decade or so later, when the artistic world is tumbling pell mell up some other alley.

In both cases "fashion" temporarily paralyses the faculty that perceives beauty. If a thing is wrong from its own point of view we realize its wrong-

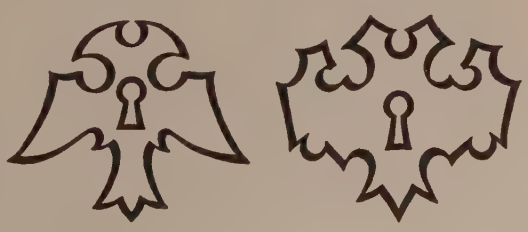
ness and shudder at its unholy ugliness, unless some irrational "fashion" blinds us. It is man's punishment for forgetting that it is the meaning of ornament and not the pleasure that its perfection gives us that is its first reason for being.

It is not reasonable, yet it is true, that the dead husks of many symbols that once were living remain with us today. They are fossils, superstitions. We still perform certain ritual acts without knowing why we do so. We read our children "fairy stories," and later have them study the details of classical mythology, but without being able to tell them what doctrines these stories and myths were invented to perpetuate. We retain the use of many ornaments and decorations but without remembering their original meanings, or without perhaps even suspecting that such things ever had meanings.

As in the case of the other superstitions, this subject has apparently been very little studied, and so it cannot be written of with any sure authority, or with any expectation of being able to cover the field. Nevertheless, in the light of what we do know of such basic and ancient analogies as those associated with the Sun, the House, the Pillar, etc., we can feel pretty sure that in some cases we can pierce the cloud of forgetfulness that hangs over many of our decorative conventions. Let us take a few examples:

We are in the habit of surmounting our flag poles with a gilded sphere. Why? Why not a white cube, a green cylinder or a purple pyramid? Why anything at all? We have seen the gold ball there so long that we no longer think that there could be a reason for it. We think of the flag pole as merely the support of a flag. And yet, if we consider the matter, it is the flag that is the adjunct. The straight wooden shaft, surmounted by the sign of the Sun, is the primary symbol, and the flag is no more than the pennon on a lance, an indication of whose center of the universe this is. The substitution of the golden eagle for the golden ball carries, of course, the same intention.

Why have the escutcheon plates on our traditional bureaus and highboys the curious elaborated shapes to which habit has accustomed us? A study of these forms makes it pretty clear that they are the degenerate descendants of two-headed eagles. The eagle and the door are both Sun symbols, and were anciently associated. The door is something that shuts and can be locked with a key. Keyholes and the Sun thus became connected in peoples' minds, and keyhole plates were reasonably given the eagle form. This may seem fantastic at first sight, but there seems little doubt that to our ancestors such concatenations of ideas were usual and even commonplace.



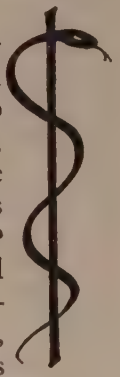
Why do we "wear a feather

in our cap?" Why not a reed or a flower? Here again we run across the Eagle. The wearing of feathers has a universal ritual significance, not only in the New World, but in the Old. The wearer of an eagle's feather "assimilates himself to the Eagle," especially with respect to lightness (immateriality) and flight. He expresses his desire to approach to the noble qualities of the Sun. The Eagle and the Phoenix (another fire or Sun bird) were early types of Christ, as was the Peacock whose flesh, says St. Augustine, never corrupts. Great crowns of peacock feathers were worn at the Christian court of Byzantium.

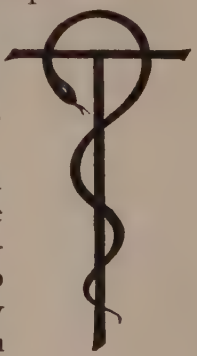
We still remember that wedding rings have a meaning, but how many remember the fullness of that meaning? Why is the wedding ring a simple band, and why is it of gold? Why is an engagement ring furnished with a crystal, if possible with a diamond? Why not a bit of ivory, or horn, or coral, or some other precious metal? Who remembers that ear-rings once spoke of doctrine, and what doctrine that was, and the representative of what stood on guard at that entrance to the brain?

Who remembers why so many oriental rugs have a zigzag or meander in their outer border, and what connection this has with the ancient idea of the River Ocean that ran all around the world, or with the principle of Act and Potency? Or why other rugs are covered with flowers, or wild animals, and what this has to do with the doctrine of Eden and the Fall?

Why were safety pins, the *fibulae* of the Romans, so often made in the form of snakes, so that the old serpent holds the end of his tail in his mouth? What has this snake to do with the chthonic animal, deep under ground, whose head was pierced by Michael in the beginning, or with the snake of healing twined about the caduceus of Asklepios, or the snake who ornaments the Christian Tau Cross?



Who remembers why we customarily put a tinsel star, or candle or other light at the top of our Christmas Tree, or why this is an evergreen whose branches, like the rafters of a roof, slope down and not up as with most trees, and why it is associated with gifts? Why do we say that Santa Claus comes bringing us his gifts down the chimney? Who is Santa Claus, anyhow, and what has he to do with the Christian Christmas?



Why are the supports of our chests and other pieces of furniture so often carved in the form of claws—the claws of lions? Who remembers that the King's throne was formerly guarded by two lions, and that these claws are all that remains of those kingly animals? Why does the water in our public fountains so often

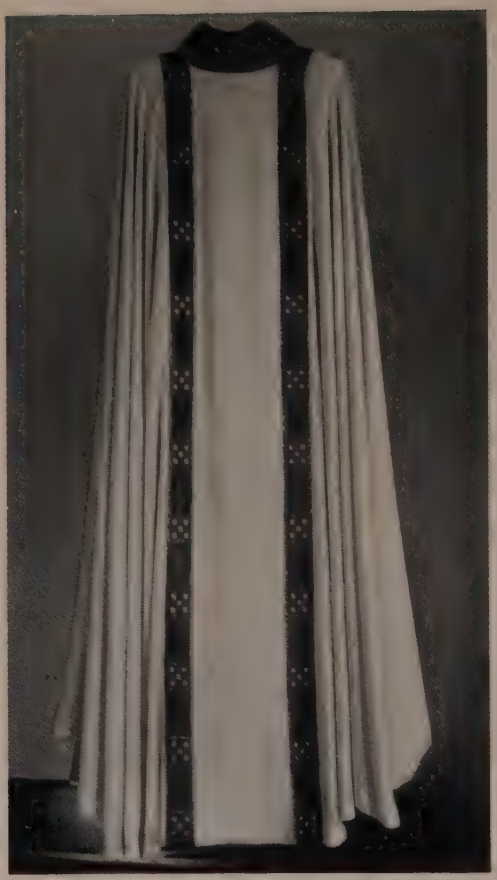
(*continued on page 21*)

ABOVE—THE HOLY GHOST CHASUBLE, MADE BY THE ECCLESIASTICAL ART DEPARTMENT, ST. MARY'S INSTITUTE, O'FALLON, MO. THE CHASUBLE IS CHINESE RED WITH THE ORPHEYS IN A DEEP RED VELVET.

LEFT—Vestment set made by the Dominican Sisters, Siena Heights College, Adrian, Michigan. The chasuble is extended to show the "cut" of the garment. It is cut on a 48" radius circle, slashed at the sides to allow free arm movement. The crepe-like material drapes gracefully.

RIGHT—Vestment set made at Siena Heights College by the Dominican Sisters. Note that each part of the set bears a different style of cross.

ABOVE—White chasuble made by the Sisters of St. Benedict, St. Joseph, Minn.



RIGHT—The "Bell Chasuble" made by the Ecclesiastical Art Department, St. Mary's Institute, O'Fallon, Mo. The garment is cut in a complete circle with an opening in the center. This, the original style of chasuble, requires much material, hence the need of soft stuff to ensure pliability. This chasuble is of fine white silk crepe; the deep henna shade orpheys are embroidered in gold.

LEFT—Chasuble made by the Sisters of St. Benedict, St. Joseph, Minnesota. The chasuble is violet in color with emblems of the passion.

still issue from the mouth of a stone lion? Who remembers that the lion is one of the types of the Sun, and that it is the Sun who lifts up and pours down the water upon us—water, most essential to the continuance of human and of all other life?

WE could go on, but as we went on we would find it increasingly difficult to answer our own questions. A scholarly study of the subject is needed for which no one, so far, seems to have found time.

But we know enough to be quite certain that there was once an intelligible meaning in all such things. These meanings have been obscured by our symbolic degeneracy. We are superstitious, and do not know it. The man who finds the lion's head squirting water in a modern fountain "decorative," is as intellectually contemptible as he who finds Friday the 13th fearsome. In some ways this forgetfulness seems worse than the mere vulgar abuse, with which we are so familiar, of symbols whose meaning we still know. For this utter forgetfulness of the meaning of one of the most important of human activities shows that we are cut off from our own intellectual traditions, and therefore doomed to a still further intellectual decline. It means that there can be no reform or rebirth of Catholic art, or any art, until we succeed in reuniting ourselves with out own cultural traditions and in learning to think once more as civilized and cultured people have always thought.

For Christians the affair is even more serious still. Christ, in His teaching, spoke to all kinds of men, and to each kind he spoke in the idiom which would make the reception of His message most easy. To the simple and unlettered He spoke in parables concerning the everyday things of life—strayed sheep, weeds in the grain crop, patching old clothes, losing pennies, squabbles about wages. But to the learned He spoke in other terms, and "they were astonished at His wisdom and His answers." What was this learned idiom that they should be astonished at His familiarity with it? It was without doubt the language of symbolism, which we have so much forgotten. The very letters of the Hebrew alphabet refer to these same analogies. The first five letters are—*Aleph* the Bull, *Beth* the House, *Gimel* the Camel, *Daleth* the Door, and *He* the Window. Many of the references that He made to Himself, and that are made by the inspired writers to Him, are only partially understood if we have no knowledge of this ancient and practically universal idiom. Why does He call Himself a Door? Why is He referred to by St. Paul as a Rock? Why as the Sun? Why does St. James speak of life as a Wheel? How can we understand perhaps the most plausible interpretation of the passage about the camel and the needle's eye, if we do not know that "camel" is synonymous with "stupid person," and that the eye of the needle is one of the many types of the Sun-door? If we allow ourselves to forget what little is still remembered of one of the languages in which He spoke, we have ourselves to blame if miss much of His message.

THE difficulty of writing about things that have been forgotten is that they have been forgotten. We could make out a far more interesting case for the intellectually respectable origins of "superstitions" and "ornaments" if

we were not ourselves victims of the very degeneracy that obscures the origins. As it is, we can only fumble our way a little in the direction in which we are convinced that the truth lies. We pick up a hint here, make a guess there, and often blunder.

Nevertheless we believe that the ground on which we stand is firmer than it must look. Our antagonists, the secular-minded students of symbolism, assert that we, the traditionalists, are reading meanings into things that originally had none. Our assertion is that they are reading out the meanings. The proof of our contention lies, as Dr. Coomaraswamy has written, "in the *perfection*, the *consistency* and the *universality* of the pattern in which these meanings are united."

In the next issue of the *Quarterly* we shall try to draw some practical conclusions from what we have been able to reconstruct of this pattern, discussing particularly some of the implications of the distinction between the sacred and secular views of life.

GRAHAM CAREY

Art a Prayer

IN this whirligig of formulas called the educational system there should be a peaceful, active, but unruffled spot for the art program. Yet it seems at times that art causes more heartaches and worry than any other subject. That it has become a problem to so many proves that it has been forced out of position, and we must try to get it back into its proper place. Before finding out where it belongs, let us be sure first that it does belong. And paradoxically, some of us say that it doesn't belong. No, definitely! For not all that passes under the name of art today belongs in our Catholic schools.

Let us view two familiar situations. Here is Sister Jane's first grade class on a Friday afternoon quietly and busily coloring some outline drawings of the life of Christ. On Monday morning all the results are on the tag board, and Sister Jane's mind is at peace again, for the room looks colorful in its "veneer of art."

Leaving Sister Jane, let us walk into an up-to-date second grade room. A miniature Barnum and Bailey Circus is under construction. Here are tents, merry-go-rounds, and cages, Animals are in the act of being stuffed. Jack is ambling around like the camel he is to portray in the play written by Bill and Mary. Everything is in a hubbub, and, most wonderful of all, Sister Joan is having a lot of fun too. "It's creative activity," she says. But if we should question Sister as to the purpose of the undertaking, she replies, "It's exciting and the children like it. It's the modern way."

If what these two dear Sisters are teaching is art, then *it has no place in our Catholic school system.* Copying pictures or coloring another's drawings can never be art. Art is a language, a means of expression. What opportunity for expression was offered in the first grade class? Sister ought to be warned. According to an old Indian legend, God said to His people, "I have taught you how to design, and if I find you copying from one another, I shall take it all away."

Let us not teach insincerity by making art an imitation. Thank God, there aren't many Sister Janes left—and of course, as Father Lord always says, we know there aren't any among our readers.

What is wrong with the second situation, that in Sister Joan's class? Sister Joan is an excellent entertainer, we grant, but to amuse is not the primary purpose of art. Is it because so many teachers consider it an entertaining medium that art is pushed to the last half hour of the last day of the week? Sister Joan is the type that is always shopping for new ideas to keep up with the times. But are we so satisfied with this age that we should waste time trying to keep abreast? It would be a mad race, indeed! If we are in earnest in our outlook on life, we cannot fail to sense the materialism, the false philosophy at the root of many of the trends of the time. This is not saying that modern art education lacks its good points; there are many fine methods and excellent materials available, but what do we do with them? We do not always use

them properly. Life lacks a pattern today, and art, instead of being looked upon as a service rendered to God and to man, is regarded as a means of doing service to oneself primarily. Art is a purposeful activity, not a mere diversion. It is right reason in making and should help us do more beautifully the simple homely things which have meaning and contribute to the happiness of others.

Let us look at a third classroom. October's bright blue sky forms the ceiling in the city park; the floor is carpeted with green grass; the yellow, red, and gold trees wall in a third grade group which has just spilled pell mell out of a bus. With skipping feet and gay laughter they scramble for the myriad colored leaves lying on the ground.

These boys and girls have been studying about the providence of God in giving man warm and beautiful clothing. When they come to the bear cage, Bruin gets in front of her two little cubs. Past the alligator, the wolf, the fox, the owls, the monkey, they come to the little deer. "Oh, Bambi!" they all cry out. After an hour we see them back at school again. And then, when given materials, each child paints. Some do trees, some the bear family. There are deer, owls, monkeys, trees, and even the bus. Some show the Creator in the act of "furring" the animal. Johnny shows himself shaking hands with God and saying a hearty "thank you." Mary draws her mother in a new fox coat, and Jackie makes an abstract design of color and calls it a peacock. The teacher walks around, encouraging originality and helping to clarify concepts. Art is living with meaning. Subject matter is life. Experience is discovery. The child learns with his mind and his heart. Naturally, such a situation cannot be duplicated, but the underlying principle can be. And that is what counts.

In the medieval day the people needed a place for worship—they built the cathedral. It was the concrete expression of a Christian soul yearning for the infinite. They carved images of God, our Lady, and of saints to be placed in niches. In exquisite stained glass windows they portrayed the Bible stories to teach the people. Their life moved in a pattern of integrity. They saw the *use* of art, and they used it for the expression of their joy in all creation and their praise of the Creator. Man, as a member of the Mystical Body of Christ, must again use the world for the praise of God. All that is made must be made beautiful, for it is the beauty of all created things that best expresses the glory of God.

The question presenting itself now might be, "What requires making?" Classroom situations will determine much. Books like *Art in the Classroom* by Natalie Cole, and *Art for the Schools of America* by Harold Gregg, and a shelf full of others answer such a question synthetically—but what needs making more than anything else is a world that is Christ-conscious. We must do our part to swing the *this-worldly* culture to an *other-worldly* culture. We must "be about our Father's business." A half-hearted action won't do the job. All our energies must be directed to tying the world to a Christ-base. We have been inhaling the pagan, sensate educational air for so long that most of us are not even conscious of just how un-Catholic our action has become.

In the second class we used above as an example, was there even a trace of Christian teaching? When we select a project or problem, let us have an objective in mind and form a basic concept. Then let all effort be directed toward realizing that concept. Subject matter alone won't do it, though it may be a help. Instead of taking a circus project, therefore, why not substitute the Creation of the World? One would have the whole gamut of the animal kingdom there—an even wider selection than that suggested by Ringling Brothers. Or if one wanted a less inclusive arrangement, how about Noah's Ark where all would come in pairs?

A CHILD will express the life with which he is familiar. If our pupils of their own accord never choose to portray the life of the Church, then it is time for us to examine our consciences. If we live intimately with the Liturgy, those we contact are bound to be warmed by the flame. Conditioning our response to values, spiritualizing our intellects—these are means of restoring the ideal of human sanctity.

Graham Carey says, "It is not the kind of thing made that distinguishes good art from bad art, art from no art, but the perfection of intelligence and will in the artist."

Instead of being Santa Claus conscious at the Christmas season, every Catholic teacher certainly should get enthusiastic about the "little Boy of heavenly birth." Constructing a stable, making little statues of wood, or of any other suitable material should be of profit to every child. If every one in a class were to carry home a little stable, we should be instrumental in making homes somewhat more Christ-minded. Let us retell the Bible story, and read from books like *The Steps of St. Francis*, by Raymond, in which the author so vividly describes how the Poor Man of Assisi made the first stable. One will certainly then get into the spirit, with all the ardor of St. Francis, "whose ears were homesick for the harpings of eternity."

If we are making toys, let us squeeze in an angel occasionally, or a saint or two; and if a wolf or a bird, make them "God's creatures all."

How much are we doing to stem the commercialism of Christmas? Why not make wrapping papers with a Christian motive significant of the feast, instead of dogs, coaches and mistletoe; why not further the making and the buying of cards that convey the Christmas message in both picture and greeting? Such problems are timely.

In Advent one might scan the Missal for suggestions. The Advent wreath could be constructed and hung. The "O Antiphons" should make an excellent lettering and symbol designing project. The Gospels of the Mass lend themselves to endless illustrative material. They are an inexhaustible reservoir, and ever alive.

Let us make the saints, especially the modern ones and those who appeal to young people, real people. St. Francis, our great little man of the Umbrian hills, who was the great lover, the great artist, and the great saint, is always a special friend of children. And then there is Don Bosco, another happy saint.

Besides saints' days and the great feast days of Christ and our Blessed Mother, we might also do something about Christianizing national holidays, such as Columbus Day. Hallowe'en could be swung to All Saints Day—one could cite examples indefinitely.

ART in our schools should be given a bent away from the sensate and become magnetized by the ideational. Christian art must of necessity be symbolic. It has about it the element of the supernatural which is difficult to represent graphically. Symbolism has some part in all genuine art, and it was the strong picture language of the early Church until the Renaissance, flattering the sensual in man, robbed this art of its meaning. Our youth cannot appreciate the symbolic Church decoration if we do not give them the basic with which to read.

One of the Sisters told me this summer that a group of seminarians were asked the meaning of the Chi Rho. Not one of them responded. Finally, one lad dared to make a guess. "Could it be Pius X?" This coming from seminarians who were educated in our Catholic grammar and high schools is a revelation. Is it just possible that as Christian educators some of us have not quite measured up?

Children love symbols. A head, two rectangles for legs and two for arms make a man to them. Two lines forming a cross will mean God. They often surprise us with their reasoning minds. Miss Maud Ellsworth tells us that when she was three years old, knowing that God made man, she drew a picture and took it to her grandmother saying, "See, I'm God. I made a little man." When anyone creates something good with originality and skill he partakes of the Divine. He is not God, as little Maud put it, but he is God-like.

Those of you who are supervisors or who deal with teachers who have not specialized in art, have often heard the statement, "Now that all sounds very well, but I am not trained in art." To them I would reply that every normal child is born with some degree of aesthetic sense, and every teacher can be helpful in developing this sense. The blossoming of the pupil's talents depends more upon the right atmosphere than it does upon instruction. It is the teacher's confidence in and her appreciation of the pupil's effort that will make for success. If she lacks an art training, she should not attempt to play the part of the art critic. One can be helpful as an understanding and sympathetic friend who provides a comfortable working situation and inspires the confidence necessary to an expansive atmosphere. Children from three to seven are usually well satisfied with their work and seldom want help. Older children, however, grope for information to aid them in representation, and, when the adult is not fully prepared to give them this information, observation from actual forms is the next best help. If Jack cannot get his man to sit, Harry will pose for him. The powers of observation should be developed, but more emphasis could be placed on direct thinking. One child, according to Coomaraswamy, expressed himself this way: "First I think, and then I draw my think."

If one can regard pupil-learning as more important than teacher-teaching, she need not worry. Let us just try to live up to the definition of a saint that a little boy gave as he looked at a stained glass window, "A saint is one who lets the light shine through." Just let the light of the Spirit shine through you and good art must necessarily result. The Divine Paraclete will be felt doing things, and "the earth will be enkindled."

Deep within every human being is a vast imaginative power. Ouspensky says every child is an artist. He

> ". . . . hears the voices of stone,
> understands the whisperings of ancient walls
> or mountains, rivers, woods, and plains. He
> hears the voice of the silence, understands the
> psychological differences between silences."

Francis Thompson was a great artist poet because he learned how to keep the soul of a child. Fra Angelico painted in the spirit of child wonder. And again one turns with pride to Francis, the happiest of the Larks, who in his little way sang the greatest of poetic songs the world ever listened to. Even if he never actually put a paint brush to paper (perhaps he did) he, next to Christ and His Blessed Mother, was the inspiration for more art than any two other persons. If the teacher will be mindful of the words of Pope Pius XI, she cannot be mediocre: "All have the imperative duty," he commands, "that of doing the impossible."

Let us be grooved to the saddle and with Louise Imogen Guiney pray, "Thou leadest, O God! All's well with Thy troopers that follow."

SISTER HELENA, O. S. F.

Reflections on Chinese Art [1]

CHRISTIANITY is essentially catholic. The Church is not so small that there is room for only one exclusive master race, one exclusive master literature. Every culture, as the Holy Father says, has a place in the Church and is welcome to make its home there—a fact we sometimes overlook. Having developed what we choose to call European culture, we have come to believe that the European nations have obtained a monopoly on Christianity, and that therefore we have the right to impose our concepts on other nations and peoples. Many Christian civilizations are possible.

In our thinking about art we have taken similar narrow viewpoints. There is no one Christian art, for every form of art has expressed but one aspect of Christianity without managing to express it all. There are infinite possibilities of expressing Christian thought in the art of other peoples, just as different saints express different aspects of Christ's individuality without expressing the whole Christ. St. Francis expressed His poverty, St. Benedict His politeness. No one has imitated Christ to such a point that there remains no other way of imitating Him. Christ did not become man in an individualistic sense of the word. Nor did He intend His Church—or Church art—to belong to one race. He became *Man*. He came to fill the world, and intended that every element that has some value in Christian life must be touched by the Incarnation. Nothing good in thought and act can escape the power of possession of God. Everything that is good, noble, right has some value and must be Christianized.

The purpose of foreign missions, therefore, is not to bring Occidental civilization to the evangelized countries. The Society for the Propagation of the Faith with profound wisdom has persistently outlined the objective of missionary activity: "Do not be over-zealous in persuading these peoples to change their rites, manners, and customs when such are not incompatible with religion and morals. It is an utter absurdity to try to transplant France, Spain, Italy, or any other country into China. That is not the duty of the missionary. It is not nationalism but the Faith that you are transplanting in foreign soil—a faith which neither condemns nor rejects the honest rites and customs of any nation. Do not seek to replace these people's customs with European ones. It is far better that you adapt yourselves to theirs."

This broad sympathy and comprehension of the custom, thought, and art of evangelized countries flows from a most important intellectual charity. The missionaries must view the civilizations of non-Christian peoples as the groundwork for a new civilization. The latter must be but a continuity of the secular civilization of these peoples, enriched however by the new mental outlook Christianity affords.

This sympathetic understanding of the customs, art, and thought of an evangelized country is not dictated by missionary opportunism but stems from

1. Translated from the French by Sister Mary-Julie, O.P.

a keen awareness of the transcendence of Christianity, which cannot be totally incorporated into any civilization or merely human organization. Just as no democratic or monarchial government could pretend to have sprung from the Christian spirit and to exploit it for its own purposes, so no form of civilization could relegate to itself alone the title of Christianity and pretend to have absorbed all its richness.

Each art translates in its own way some particular aspect of the Christian life without exhausting its possibilities or potentialities. Thus, Graeco-Roman art, in showing that grace does not destroy nature, emphasizes the importance and natural dignity of man in creation. Byzantine art, by its sense of the hierarchies and the complex structures which surround the individual, interprets another aspect of Christian life—its social and disciplined aspect, its sacerdotal sense of subordinate and unified values. And, lastly, does not baroque art exemplify the super-abundant, excessive, and even exaggerated worship that humanity owes to its God: *Tantum audes quantum potes?* What then will Chinese art give to the Church when, in its turn, it must orchestrate the Christian theme? What new assonances will the Christian life take on when it is lived by the pacific and discreet Chinese who have such a well-balanced sense of humor and wisdom?

THE world envisaged by the Chinese artist can, it seems to me, offer a favorable starting point for the beginning of a great Christian art. I do not mean by Christian art solely sacred art, but all art which corresponds to a complex and harmonious vision of life, to a Catholic vision of the world, a vision in which everything of value will have its place; for the Christian artist does not make manifest his baptized and sanctified soul only when he paints a Madonna; a landscape in which he has expressed his calm and joyful admiration of nature will manifest his Christian vision of the world with none of the emotionalism of the Pantheist or the hatred of beauty of the Manichean.

The great Chinese landscape artists, in fact, have a deeply spiritual vision of the world. Madame Lion-Goldschmidt notes that "Chinese art at first appears an easily assimilable art in which the extravagant, the exotic, and the picturesque are within the reach of everyone." After making a careful study of it, one gradually begins to understand that: "This culture, formed before the year 1000 of our era, far from having deteriorated or becoming abstract, has steadily evolved, enriching and perfecting itself, and coming down to us as rich in moral content as it is excellent in form and technique."

Serenity and harmony are the salient characteristics of Chinese painting. The Chinese artist is utterly at peace in his contemplation of Nature. He is not a devotee of her turbulent and riotous moods, however, but of her calmer aspects. In their own way, Chinese landscapes express the relations between man and the earth. They give a sense of mutual rapport; they show that the earth is not our mother but our Little Sister with whom we can be gay, with whom we can play: "Our Sister, Water; our Brother, the Sun." There is a healthy amount of Franciscan respect and charm in the Chinese attitude towards Nature.

Unlike ours, Chinese artists are not trained by the study of plaster models and the nudes of the Academies. They are nature-lovers. They exult in the country; they climb mountains, they allow themselves to become absorbed in the life of the forest and the sea. They are enraptured by water. This is how Li-Jin-hua describes the spiritual baptism of the artists: "Huan-Tzu-chou often spends the day in the company of the trees, bamboos, bushes, and masses of rocks, in the very heart of savage mountains. At times, to view better the currents and waves, he descends to the meeting place of the waters, where the river joins the sea. There, insensible to wind and rain and the raging of the ocean, he remains lost in contenplation. This is why the work of the Great Distracted-One (the surname of the painter) images forth a thousand emotional and spiritual states, forever changing and as wonderful as Nature herself."

If Chinese painting draws its purest motives from contact with nature, yet it never degenerates into pure naturalism, or the art of the photographer or realist. Naturalism postulates an anti-Christian attitude on the part of the artist despite the fact that some excellent Christians are naturalists. For naturalism ignores that man's senses must be appeased and elevated by intelligence; it disregards the necessary union of intelligence and sense perception which is the fundamental element in all Christian humanism, which is neither bestial nor angelic.

But the quest for this artistic balance between the intellectual and the sensory, which so torments the great painters of our time that they oscillate between a sensual naturalism and an inhuman, abstract geometricalism, without being able to fix upon anything solid, has reached its end in Chinese painting. Su Tung-po writes: "If a critic's observations touch only upon mere outer resemblance, we shall compare his comprehension to that of a child." Chinese landscapes are subjective without suffering from the violent impact of the artist's too intrusive ego, as so often occurs in Occidental painting, where the artist's reiteration of his private ego often makes his work unintelligible to all but the initiated.

The Chinese artist dominates over nature not by his physical force but by his intelligence: "The unlimited field of contemplative admiration in which man loses himself is thus a fruitful source of inspiration; for the contemplation of nature teaches above all the lesson of humility. One of the secrets of Chinese art particularly striking and intriguing to our western eyes is the comparatively insignificant place the human figure holds there. Nature always dominates over the stature of man and relegates him to a second place." But while nature may dominate over the stature of man, his intelligence dominates over nature. Chinese art opens the door to the spectator's imagination. Certain pictures—I have in mind particularly the landscapes of Houei-Tsong (1082-1135) which leave three-fourths of the canvas bare—resemble that verse of Andrew Gide in which, after he has minutely and meticulously described the rooms upon which the doors of the house open, he ends his poem: "And the last door opens upon the plains." Like Gide, the greatest paintings of the

epoch of Song open our imagination upon wide, open spaces, and politely seem to invite us to contemplate them at leisure.

Chinese artists have best defined this technique which requires the collaboration of the spectator by saying: "Conception precedes the brush, and when the brush has finished its work conception still continues."

The masters of Chinese painting know just how far to carry the power of suggestion. This double result of blending the pictorial and the suggestive is obtained by what they call "k'ungling," the painting of a picture that is at once empty yet full of life. In this kind of artistic achievement the great landscape artists of the tenth and thirteenth centuries were masters. They reached such heights in their power of suggestion through barrenness of detail that one readily perceives that this art "which seems mere playwork is in reality more difficult than any other." It is an exacting mistress. One cannot approach it lightly. It asks something of the spectator; it offers him a diverse and lively play of impressions and sentiments, but it demands reactions in return; it awakens in him a state of soul. It is active in itself, and it demands the comprehension of the beholder, for it has something to say.

Chinese art has often been held up to reproach for its lack of luminosity and shade and geometric perspective. And yet how is it possible not to praise it for the subtle sense of agreement among its elements—the rocks and clouds, the trees and fog, and the aerial perspective of which the Chinese painters are masters (for example, see "The Mountain-after-the-Rain" by Koa-K'o-kung, 1275.)

No, the real deficiency of Chinese art (if so it can be called), the field it has left practically untouched, is the human figure and the painting of subjects. But today man is trying to get even by forcing his way into Chinese painting. Lin Yutang writes: "The discovery of the human body is indeed one of the outstanding results of Western influence. By changing the source of artistic inspiration, it has effected quite an upheaval in our way of looking at life." This irruption into painting of the man of flesh, of woman, of the nude, and the painting of a scene instead of a state of the soul, seems to me to threaten the very individuality of the Oriental artist. If this influence continues, the Chinese artist will be distinguished from the Occidental painter only by the nuances of his technique.

Certain modern artistic movements seem to suffer from the burden of attempting to paint pictures which do not suggest an idea by creating an atmosphere, but simply aim to give one something to look at.

A Christian influence can be inserted in a less arbitrary fashion into the Chinese artistic tradition. Sacred art in Europe has emphasized above all the external or episodic character of the Christian mysteries, whereas Christian Chinese painting will place the accent primarily upon the interior content because of the Chinese tendency to embody their ideas pictorially.

Artists competing for an award in painting have often been given for subject a few lines of poetry which they are to illustrate pictorially, a line of Wei-Ing Wu's verse, for example: "An abandoned boat drifting across a stream."

WOULD it not be possible to organize a new school of painting around a state of soul, a Christian mystery? Then man and the episode would find a place in Chinese painting and would enrich it with new motifs without despoiling it.

Father Charles, S.J., when speaking of India, addressed this prayer to God: "Perhaps, in order to give us a full, practical, wholly enlightened knowledge of Your Beatitudes, it is necessary that the converted and baptized Buddhist people should have meditated upon Your words. It is perhaps yonder, that You have prepared for us, near Mandalay or Kuling, the Christian teacher who will give us the spiritual exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount."

Perhaps it is Pekin which will give us a truly sacred painting which will not ravish the soul even with its beauty, but in effacing itself will guide the soul towards the contemplation of the mysteries, towards their spiritual content.

The art which would best serve as a steady norm for Chinese painting is the refined, didactic, intellectual, yet humble Gothic statuary. There is something akin to all mankind in this art. It has the consistency of flesh and blood while remaining untouched by an abacadabra of baffling obscurities and symbolical intricacies. Nor is this suggestion of a mutual exchange for a mutual profit new or strange. Emile Male's thesis that the massive sculptures of French cathedrals were inspired by Persian miniatures has been well authenticated.

These various considerations illustrate the way in which profane Chinese art has prepared an iconographic cycle for the beginning of a great Christian art. This Christian interpolation could be accomplished without creating a mere spiritual flatness or veneer, or yielding to an insipid or even vulgar vision of things.

But Christian art, if it really and truly wants to be grafted upon Chinese art, must approach the problem from the inside and not from the outside. Chinese art is too refined to suffer copying, and too ancient not to run the risk of being lost by being confined to simple rules and processes.

The Chinese distinguish *Facade* or showy painting from really inspired painting, in which the vitalized rhythm interiorly determines the free and necessary curve of a line. And the professional technique which has taught artists the value of a single firm line without retouches, and of a harmony independent of symmetry which gives a sense of spaciousness, is for the Chinese the calligraphy which "Pure Painting" was for Picasso.

The X-Ray shows the difference between the bony structure of an original work and a very good copy. But almost identical results are obtained in both: in the original, by a single, undulating, subtle but firm line; in the copy, by juxtaposition, by retouches, and a laying-on of colors. And this is why we cannot overemphasize the counsels of His Excellency, Monsignor Costantini, the secretary of the Propaganda, in speaking to religious missionary organizations: "I believe that our splendid missionaries would do well to seek out native artists, even pagans like Luc Tchen, and show them Occidental models;

but they shall not direct them to copy these models, but rather to be inspired by them to express themselves, and just as they feel."

In conclusion, when thinking of the long road the Church has still to travel one cannot avoid a striking thought: whether or not the words of Mauriac may be true: "Perhaps we ourselves are still the first Christians."

Our Faith has drained the resources, the talents, and the genius of the Greeks, Italians, French, and Spanish, but the genius of many other races must still serve it. We are perhaps assisting in a great work, the worldwide orchestration of the Christian *cantata* which shall offer to God an intelligent and lofty song, a hymn of praise: "*Sicut in locutionibus exterioribus secundum melodiam et proportionem prolatis resultat cantus sensibilis, ita in locutionibus interioribus et etiam affectionibus secundum proportionem et ordinem debitum ad Deum directis resultat quaedam melodia spiritualis et quidam cantus intelligibilis.*

JOHN MENASCE

DA versus CAA

"FOR a long time I have felt strongly that the elementary school is the place to inculcate the first correct notions of Catholic Art, and, in my opinion, the only flaw in your *Quarterly* has been remedied through the *Art Supplement*, which should be of great value to the schools of our diocese." (Reference is to the *Art Supplement*, by Sister Augusta, Mount St. Joseph, Ohio.)

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"The *Quarterly* must meet the needs of its readers, and its readers' needs are apparently very general. Grade schools have never been excluded from the possible advantages of CAA influence, inasmuch as Beauty, Truth, and Goodness are for any comer."

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"You know the wide range of the exhibition (Contemporary Religious Art, at Boston), but every time I go in I feel the lack in most cases of any real religious feeling behind the subject—which, of course, reflects our superficial, imitative age. If nothing else has come out of the beginnings of the CAA than what the members have here the effort would be justified."

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"Religious spirit and experimentation can be united successfully. It is fitting that the CAA yield fruits that substantiate its creed."

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"Speaking of making vestments, I have done a little sewing since last summer in the way of Church things. I made a baptismal robe similar to the one you had there. I made the first surplice I have ever attempted. Our chapel was remodeled, so after that course in Liturgical Art, I felt like putting some of it to practice. I had received some money as a gift and spent it for material to make the antependia and tabernacle veils. It was rather a big undertaking and I was sewing many a day, but now that it is completed I consider my efforts well spent. It was a complete gift—you remember?"

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"It must be that some people do read and heed."

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"We need teachers of aesthetics who are genuinely interested in art, not in catalogues of names and pictures and epochs. Our students aren't being trained to see and to hear; they are being trained to think only—which is a perfect recipe for misery, or to feel sociologically—which is another recipe for nosiness and fuddling in other people's business. Colleges are forgetting that they are training students primarily to be happy. We can be happy only when able to contemplate beauty in form, color, pattern, idea, moral goodness, truth, and so on *ad infinitum*."

Shades of Dante and the Christmas issue!

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"At that, I still think that the arts are hierarchical in order. It is inevitable that they should be. The world is made that way. Ade once said that it is as much an art to cook a meal as to paint a Transfiguration—which is true in the sense that both processes require reasoning about the ends. But common sense says that the one is a higher art. It must be! I do wish there was no ambiguity about that in the CAA. In plugging for all the arts we can be guilty of overstatement—thinking more about the general issue than the facts. I would much prefer having it understood that an art is an art, basing the statement on a definition of art, but nevertheless allowing for a hierarchical order within the arts. Philosophy is a science and so are mathematics and chemistry, but metaphysics is surely a higher science than physics. And a poem is a higher work of art than a piece of advertising."

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"As regards . . . . 's idea of giving the apostolate to the laity, I am doubting very much if the apostolate belongs to the laity. The CAA began as a college organization. It now even includes grade school teachers—most of them Sisters. There are only a few lay people who are hep to it all. I think the CAA is an apostolate for the Catholic schools primarily. I would not want to see it get away from the schools. New brooms always sweep clean. There may be a momentary splurge, then silence. Let things stand as they are." (Sounds dictatorial!)

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"I would be grateful to the author of the paragraph in the Christmas issue DA if he had given us the correct term for the activity in which grade school children take part for the expression of their thought and for the development of their own skill, and still more grateful if he had told us what he considers the 'real pressure'. We are not lacking in earnestness nor in willingness to take correction, but will our critics indicate the correct way?"

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From Graham Carey: "I have just been down to the cow barn to assure the Guernsey heifers that there is now little danger of any of them being given away as a prize in a symbolic art contest. To date I have received nothing in the way of entries, either by mail, express, or freight. No one has drawn up in an ox team with a huge roll containing a cosmic rug. No one has wheeled in a totem pole with the effigies of Ruskin, Morris, Lethaby, and Gill, each squatting on the other's shoulders, There has not been so much as a key with an eagle in the handle. So that is that is that.

"It is probably just as well, as what we want will be clearer when the articles on the subject of symbolism, etc., appear in the CAQ."

WHO'S WHO

WHAT is the contemporary ecclesiastical artist to do if he secures a commission to decorate a church; copy according to a tradition, or paint as he knows best? The problem of the modern religious artist is presented by *Melville Steinfels*, professional chairman of the CAA, in his "Modern Religious Art and Popular Taste." He offers some sane suggestions for the art education of the public. His address: 228 E. Superior St., Chicago.

"Superstition and Decoration," by *Graham Carey* is the second of his series of three articles on Symbolism. His address is R.R. 2, Fair Haven, Vermont. The illustrations are by Bill Cladek, 2062 Price St., Rahway, N.J.

"Some Reflections on Chinese Art," by *Father John Menasce*, 1600 Morris rd., S.E., Washington, D.C., a contributor to French and Italian periodicals and a lecturer during the summer sessions at Catholic University, affords an insight into the wisdom of the Church in providing a Christian art for foreign peoples. The above paper furnished the background for a lecture delivered at the 1943 Eastern Regional meeting held at the College of Notre Dame of Maryland, Baltimore. Translation is by Sister Mary-Julie, Columbus, Ohio.

"Art—a Prayer" by *Sister Helena*, O.S.F., Alvernia High School, Chicago, is an attempt on the part of an enthusiastic and successful teacher to inspire other art teachers to look for "sources" within themselves. She reveals the almost inexhaustible source for art subjects to be found in the Christian life, as presented in the Liturgy.

C.A.A. NEWS

THE Sixth Annual Eastern Regional Meeting of the CAA was held at the College of Notre Dame of Maryland, Baltimore, February 2 and 3. The general theme of the meeting was "Reconstruction through the Mass."

The North Central Region met February 20, at Clarke College, Dubuque, Iowa. The general theme of the meeting was "The Arts as a Permanent Basis for Inter-American Understanding."

The Institute of Modern Art, Boston, sponsored an exhibition of Contemporary Religious Art from January 13 to February 12. Artists of many creeds and nationalities were represented. Members of the CAA whose works were exhibited were: Robert Amendola, Louise Reggio, George Sotter, Lilia Dominguez, Lauren Ford, Studio Angelico, and John Howard Benson. Mrs. C. B. Perkins, who influenced the founding and later development of the CAA, is a trustee of the Institute. It is significant that other museums plan similar exhibitions for the coming season.

George Sotter, Halicong, Pa., a CAA member for many years, is an officer of the Stained Glass Association of America. During the past year he served on the Education Committee of that organization.

Sister Mary Paul, R.S.M., St. Xavier Academy, Chicago, exhibited a portrait in oil at the January show of the All Illinois Society of Fine Arts on view at Mandel's.